

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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A Letter to Readers

I am extremely grateful to the dedicated men and women of our agency for their professional contribution to the safety of California's motorists. The departments within the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency comprise the Governor's principal transportation regulatory and enforcement organizations. By combining their resources, we are making driving safer, as evidenced by the fact that the number of fatalities per miles traveled is now the lowest in the state's history.

As Secretary for Transportation, I am committed to having the best traffic safety programs possible, including anti-DUI, bicycle and pedestrian safety, occupant protection, police traffic services, roadway safety and emergency medical services. These programs and so many others are helping California achieve its traffic safety successes, such as having the highest seat belt compliance rate in the nation.



Maria
Contreras-Sweet

I have a charge from Governor Gray Davis to improve safety on California's roadways. That means relieving traffic congestion, thus affording people more quality time for work and family life. We all enjoy getting home quickly and safely after a hard day's work.

One of our shared goals is to alleviate traffic congestion by stopping unsafe driving behaviors that contribute to accidents. Through funding for more law enforcement personnel and equip-

ment, emergency response vehicles and public education, we will make our roads even safer. We are also excited about the new partnerships being established with community-based organizations in California. This innovation will expand our outreach enormously. The Governor recently awarded \$11.8 million to local community-based organizations to promote traffic safety programs.

Traffic safety is everyone's business. Governor Davis and I look forward to working with all of you to improve the quality of life for all Californians.

A stylized, handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Maria Contreras-Sweet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Maria Contreras-Sweet

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Speeding **Project** *to Com*

Concerned with a fat cash balance in the State Highway Account and lagging delivery of locally funded transportation projects, Caltrans has been in the midst of a multi-year effort to make funding and project development processes more flexible and accessible to those using them.

The changes, which are estimated by some local officials to have the potential of reducing project development costs by as much as 20 percent, have been aided by two pieces of legislation by Assemblyman Thomas Torlakson, AB 1012 and AB 2928.

The outcome of these efforts, which involved a partnership with federal, State and other local agencies, has been additional flexibility and cooperation between the agencies, resulting in a substantial improvement in delivery of local agency projects. In 1999-2000, the local agencies delivered 140 percent of the projects that were originally planned, reducing congestion and cutting into backlogs of aging and damaged facilities. Other measures that pertain strictly to State projects have promise of producing positive results.

In general, Caltrans' changes to its project development process lie in five areas:

NEPA/CEQA issues

Using federal dollars more flexibly

Better integration with permitting agencies

Providing assistance to local agencies

Easing cash flow

pletion

Among the measures adopted were several that flowed from Assemblyman Torlakson's follow-up legislation, AB 2928. For instance, local agencies may substitute State-only funds for federal funds, reducing the number of agencies involved in reviews of the projects and allowing the local agencies to comply with State environmental processes, rather than the more cumbersome federal ones. (Local agencies must still comply with applicable laws regarding endangered species and cultural resources.)

The State also put more resources to work in helping local agencies develop their projects. Local agencies, especially the smaller ones, are not regularly called upon to process projects that must comply with federal regulations. The result is that each such project results in a kind of reinvention of the wheel; with State experts assisting them, the agencies are able to move more quickly and with greater efficiency.

AB 2928 also addressed a problem that had developed in the State Transportation Improvement Program, one that affected both State projects and locally financed ones: the program covered only four years. Because of the complexity of environmental and other regulations, four years simply was not enough time in which to develop a project from concept to start of construction. As a result, projects that were in the normal project development pipeline looked as if they were being delayed.

Assemblyman Torlakson's legislation added a year to the program, but also allowed both the State and local agencies to finance two additional years of advanced development work – planning, preliminary engineering and environmental analysis before tying up funds for capital outlay.

With regard to its own projects, Caltrans began to rethink the steps in its project development process. It had been

To combat this the department initiated a “change control” effort which consisted of doing surveys, mapping, bridge site investigations and environmental analysis prior to the Project Initiation Document. The department also began doing field investigations with the permitting agencies in the Project Initiation phase, thus getting a much better picture of what those agencies would need for resource avoidance or mitigation.

One problem was that the permitting agencies often did not have enough staff to become engaged in the projects at this early stage. And they often did not have enough staff to do a timely and thorough analysis of the department's proposals when Caltrans came to them for needed permits. To solve this problem, Caltrans requested and received an additional 20.5 personnel years in its budget in order to place environmental staff in those agencies to work

*The department also began doing field investigations with the permitting agencies in the **Project Initiation phase**, thus getting a much better picture of what those agencies would need for resource avoidance or mitigation.*

generally unable to get agreement from the permitting agencies – Fish and Wildlife, Environmental Protection Agency, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers and others – early in a project's developmental life-cycle. This often meant disagreements on environmental matters after the scope of a project had been set. At worst, this meant going back to the drawing table and re-designing the project. At best, it often meant many months of haggling over project features and environmental mitigation.

Caltrans also found that it occasionally fixing the scope of the project before all adequate information was available. This resulted in changing the scope, schedule or cost of the project after it had gotten into the State Transportation Improvement Program or the State Highway Operations and Protection Program. Such changes amounted to broken promises.

exclusively on transportation projects. This is expected to provide timely decision-making and to reduce the amount of bureaucratic warfare that had formerly plagued project development.

The teams engendered by Assemblyman Torlakson's legislation made almost 200 suggestions overall. Because the teams worked independently from four separate geographic locations, many of the recommendations were overlapping. But the recommendations covered all areas of project development – from programming issues through construction. Caltrans is continuing to evaluate these recommendations and to adopt those that appear to have utility in the project development process.

AB 1012 *called for:*

- 1** Creation of advisory teams to look at ways to speed project delivery.
- 2** A comprehensive project management information system.
- 3** Providing longer lead-times and early funding of project activities for more complex projects.
- 4** Allowing Caltrans to do work on a reimbursement basis for local agencies.
- 5** A loan program to allow local agencies to use State funds on local projects.
- 6** New project development Study Report Guidelines.
- 7** A "Use it or lose it" provision, requiring local agencies to make unused funds available to other agencies.

Response to **AB 1012**

- 1** Caltrans is studying 191 recommendations for speeding project delivery made by the advisory teams.
- 2** The California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency is spearheading a proposal for the management information system.
- 3** Longer lead-times and early funding have been put into effect.
- 4** Caltrans is providing reimbursed assistance to local agencies when asked.
- 5** The loan program is in place.
- 6** Guidelines for Project Study Reports have been released.
- 7** Local agencies have responded vigorously to put their funds to work so as not to lose them.



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